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Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays October 18, 2005

It's as true in Biloxi as in Baghdad: people without electricity, clean water or basic governmental services are understandably impatient to rebuild their lives, their homes and their communities. They don't want empty promises. They rightly demand tangible progress.

In Iraq, that progress has been slow, hampered by volatile security that disrupts and delays reconstruction while sapping fiscal resources. Initial estimates of security costs have nearly tripled, from less than ten percent of total project expenses to almost thirty. Naïve planning assumptions, weak performance metrics, and limited project oversight have also slowed infrastructure repairs, training of security forces and efforts to nurture civilian governance. Frequent leadership changes and a legacy of Saddam-era corruption divert still more energy and resources from Iraq's renewal as a prosperous democratic nation.

As a result, the U.S. reconstruction effort in Iraq shows symptoms of suffering the same spiral of delays, reduced capabilities and cost overruns that plagues major weapons programs at the Pentagon. Planned electricity generation and water purification projects are scaled back while estimates of the cost to complete them escalate.

That cycle of rosy estimates and stunted outcomes exacts high political costs as well. Limited visible progress improving basic services frustrates Iraqis who wonder why a liberating coalition that conquered their nation in less than two months can't keep the lights lit after two years.

Similar problems beset the critical program to train Iraqi security forces. Culturally off-key assumptions about the transferability of Western law enforcement and military doctrines to the Iraq security mission wasted limited training time. Classes in handgun etiquette had little relevance to police and soldiers facing an insurgency armed with AK-47s.

At the same time, efforts to build civil society, the rule of law and democratic institutions have been far more successful, propelled by the inspiring courage of average Iraqis – Shi'a, Sunni and Kurd – who voted in January and on Saturday. But democracy is no silver bullet against entrenched Ba'athists and imported jihadists. Voting hours have to result in increased kilowatt hours or the killers will have all the time they need between elections to feed the insurgency on popular discontent and factional discord.

U.S. support for reconstruction, security and governance programs has helped the Iraqis make undeniable progress toward a better future. But the billions of appropriated dollars being spent in Iraq are an investment by the American people in their security as well. We have a fiduciary obligation to continually assess the execution and sustainability of our investment strategy.

Major aspects of that assessment have been vigorously pursued by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, the Government Accountability Office and the Inspectors General from other departments and agencies active in Iraq. Their findings and recommendations provide a detailed view of the strengths and weaknesses of our stewardship of Iraqi sovereignty. Other witnesses this morning will offer unique perspectives on security strategy and on the just-completed constitutional drafting and ratification process.

We appreciate the time, dedication and expertise of all our witnesses and we welcome their testimony.